

NICKOLAY OVCHAROV

TEN PEARLS FROM THE CROWN OF BULGARIA



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FROM THE CROWN
OF BULGARIA

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CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS IN VIENNA

It's Christmas time and I am in Vienna. I am walking around the halls of the large Museum of Fine Arts and I am looking for an old Bulgarian relic from the ninth century. I am referring to the amazing treasure from Nagyszentmiklos – a small settlement, presently situated on the territory of Romanian Transylvania. This treasure is a ruler's set for solemn feasts, consisting of 23 pitchers, rhytons, bowls – all of these filled with high-carat gold and decorated with lovely ornaments and mythological scenes. Supposedly, Khan Krum and Khan Omurtag, who joined these territories to the Bulgarian state, used it for their feasts.

Unfortunately, the treasure is being currently restored. Yet, on the other hand, I can see a big map of ninth and tenth century Europe. Unlike nowadays, the names of the then countries can be counted on the fingers of the one hand. On this map the whole West is occupied by the enormous empire of the Franks, established by Carl the Great. Spain and the southern parts of Italy are within the boundaries of the Great Arabian Caliphate, extending from Gibraltar to Damask. The small territories under the rule of the future Austrian emperors – the Hapsburgs, are nestling somewhere in the North. Actually, the East

was then ruled by their predecessors, the Babengergs. Meanwhile, Middle and Eastern Europe were shared between two mighty empires, whose almost one-thousand-year conflicts had coloured the political picture of the region. These two were the Eastern Roman Empire, now more often called Byzantium and Bulgaria.

Now Bulgaria is a small and weak country, dependent on the whims of the great powers. Present-day Bulgarians can hardly conceive of the enormous country, extending from the Carpathians to the Aegean Sea, from Dniepr to present Hungary. Budapest was then a border town situated between the empires of Franks and Bulgarians. Buda was in the country of Carl the Great while Pest – under the sceptre of the Bulgarian rulers.

Being a historian and archaeologist, I know all this information. However, it is pleasant to hear it from foreigners in the centre of one of the most beautiful European cities. National nihilism has so poisoned Bulgarians nowadays that sometimes the very historians ask themselves if past grandeur ever existed. And at such moments comes the turn of historical records, purposed for storing and recalling the past.

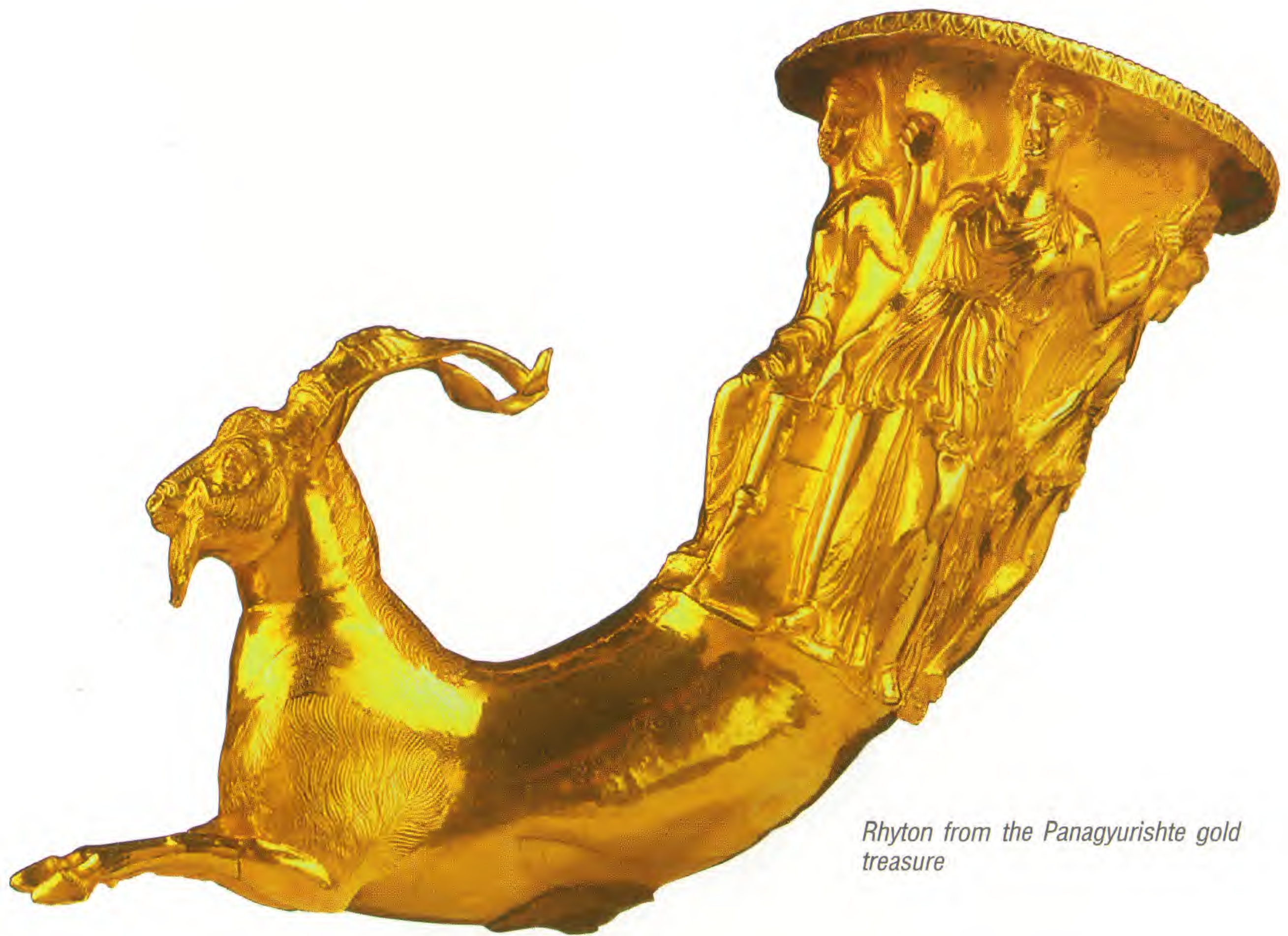
Along with Italy and Greece, the Bulgarian lands have the biggest number of archaeological sites in Europe. The cross-road position of the country in the south-eastern part of the continent pre-determines the interaction of different cultures. The temperate climate and the fertile lands have always made the central part of the Balkan Peninsula an attractive place

for many peoples. Along with its advantages, this position also has its drawbacks. Every next conqueror had to defend this paradisaical nook from other invaders. For the last 1300 years it has been defended by the Bulgarians.

Before the arrival of Bulgarians in the seventh century AD, the wonderful lands were occupied by a succession of peoples, most of who no longer exist. The first



*Jug from
the Panagyurishte gold treasure*



Rhyton from the Panagyurishte gold treasure

inhabitants from the Stone Age left traces in the mountain caves. There was a powerful upsurge of culture on the Balkans at the end of the Stone Age (the neolithic period) and in the Aenolithic-Chalcolithic Age. The oldest gold in Europe dates from the late phase of the latter. The great works of the Varna necropolis were made four thousand years BC.

There is already evidence of the existence of the populous people of the Thracians towards the end of the Bronze Age. The *Iliad* by Homer tells that Thracian heroes took part in the Trojan War in the 13th century BC. The famous Vulchetrin

treasure dates back to that time. It includes different golden cult objects, weighing 12.5 kilos in total. The most popular among the Thracians was the singer Orpheus, after who the contemporary scholars named the whole religiously-mythological system of the ancient inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula. In the 5th–1st century BC the Thracians managed to build thousands of towns, fortresses, burial mounds in resemblance of the ancient pyramids. On the other hand, the Black sea region was densely inhabited by the Hellenes, coming from Greece on their fast ships. The interaction between the two cultures gave rise to



Gilded silver rhyton from Borovo

numerous notable monuments of world-wide historical importance, as it is for example the golden Panagyurishte treasure, dating back to the 4th–3rd century BC.

However, the Thracians never managed to establish a strong united country. Odrisians, Besians and Geths often fought for dominance and thus weakened one another. Besides, with 3rd century BC the idea for a united world empire sprang up after the great marches of Alexander of

Macedon. The empire was supposed to encompass politically and culturally the whole civilized world according to the then standards – Europe, North Africa, Front Asia. The Balkans were attributed the leading role in this structure. On the one side, the so-called Hellenistic culture unified the diverse civilizations in the vast region, on the other side it opened avenues for extremely close contacts and communication.

In the year 45 AD. the last Thracian independent ruler Roemetalkes III yielded his power to the Roman emperor Claudius. The whole Balkan Peninsula became a province of the mighty Rome. However, even then it managed to preserve its leading role. On the Peninsula there was an interweaving of Thracian, Roman, Greek, Persian and African cultural traditions. And with the relocation of the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople in 324, the present Bulgarian lands became the centre of the ancient world.

Two colossal processes predetermined these turbulent times. One of them was the adoption of Christianity, which changed people's way of thinking, the other – the Great migration of peoples, which modified the boundaries of many countries and destroyed the great Roman Empire. More specifically, the western part of it because in spite of the many vicissitudes the Eastern Roman Empire continued to exist for more than 1000 years. In the 4th–6th century it endured the blows of Huns, Vandals, Goths, Slavs but it managed to



*Golden jug
from the Mogilan Mound*

preserve its integrity. While the Western Roman empire had long ago been shared among the barbarians, Byzantium under the rule of Justinian I the Great (527–565) made an attempt to restore the old imperial glory.

It was the Bulgarians that established the first independent state on the territory of the Eastern Roman Empire in 681. Thus the story of their centuries-long rivalry began but at the same time there was also cultural interaction. In 865 the Bulgarians adopted Christianity and became the main vehicle of Orthodoxy in the West, the North and the North-East. The Bulgarian lands were covered with thousands of fortresses, well-built towns, monasteries and churches.

This once again attracted tens of invaders. Bulgarians bravely defended their lands from Byzantines, Avars, Hazars, Pechenegs, Koumanians, cru-



Gilded silver jug from the Rogozen treasure

saders and Tatars. However, in the 14th century the Balkans were flooded by the Turkish hordes.

The invaders had been covetting the riches of the Bulgarian land for a long time. "This was a merry land," says the Ottoman historian Mehmed Neshry. "Sheep, honey and butter flowed from it toward the world. And the goods there were more abundant than anywhere. And its strong fortresses were more than in the other lands."

In 1395 the Turks conquered for 500 years Bulgaria and destroyed many of her cultural monuments. The Bulgarian people dramatically lagged behind in their development and since the 19th century the country has been forced to catch up with the European countries all the time. And after the shattering events of the 20th century and the collapse of the communist system Bulgaria should obviously reconsider her traditional values very seriously.



Silver vessel from the Rogozen treasure

Perhaps Bulgaria should go back to her cultural-historical heritage. Not only as a source of national pride but also as the main means of living for the Bulgarians. It is no secret that cultural-historical tourism for countries like Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey is the main source of profits in their economy. At the same time Bulgaria with her magnificent monuments totters far behind them in this respect. Not that there weren't attempts, well-funded at that, before 10 November 1989. However, tourism requires predominance of private capital and the money invested in the totalitarian regime seemed to have sunk into deep waters.

It is not enough for a country to have many and interesting monuments. It must also develop a large-scale cultural-historical tourism. It must have a developed infrastructure, spheres of service and most importantly – interest on the part of the country. However, one more thing is necessary, which can't be bought or devised.

The country needs to possess such glorious and authentic monuments as could attract tourists from the other end of the world. For the blasé and informed person at the beginning of the 21st century can't be impressed so easily. After the investing of the money needed for inspection, restoration and



Reliquary, silver, gilding, Ohrid, 18th c.

promotion such monuments could attract tourists in a given country. They will be original “engines” for the other, the more insignificant monuments, which will also be included in the business after the release of the tourist flow.

Bulgaria has these monuments. In my present feature article, I will dwell on ten of these – indisputably the pearls of the country’s ancient crown. Let’s have a walk within the limits of our beautiful mother country.



*The Church
of the Zemen Monastery*

“THE GREAT DIVINE TSAREVGRAD TURNOV”



Tsarevets

This is not a posh sentence but an extract from the work of the Bulgarian patriarch Euthymius, who lived in the second half of the fourteenth century. That was how writers called the capital of Bulgaria in the 13th–14th century. The Byzantines also

had respect for the regal town, glorifying it as “the biggest”, “the most prominent” and “the most inaccessible” on Haemus (the Balkan Mountains). Also, the Constantinople patriarch Calist straightforwardly defined it as the second most important

town in the world after Constantinople.

The modern town of Veliko Turnovo is situated in the central part of Northern Bulgaria. In order to reach it from Sofia, we have passed the built-up section of the northern motorway and then we have travelled along a picturesque road running between the main mountain ridge of the Balkan range and its foothills. The towers of

the ancient town appear suddenly after the next hill. The main parts of the old fortress were completely restored during the celebrations of the one thousand and thirty-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Bulgaria in 1981.

The naturally protected hills of Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and the Girl's Fortress are finely shaped by the meanders of the Yantra river.

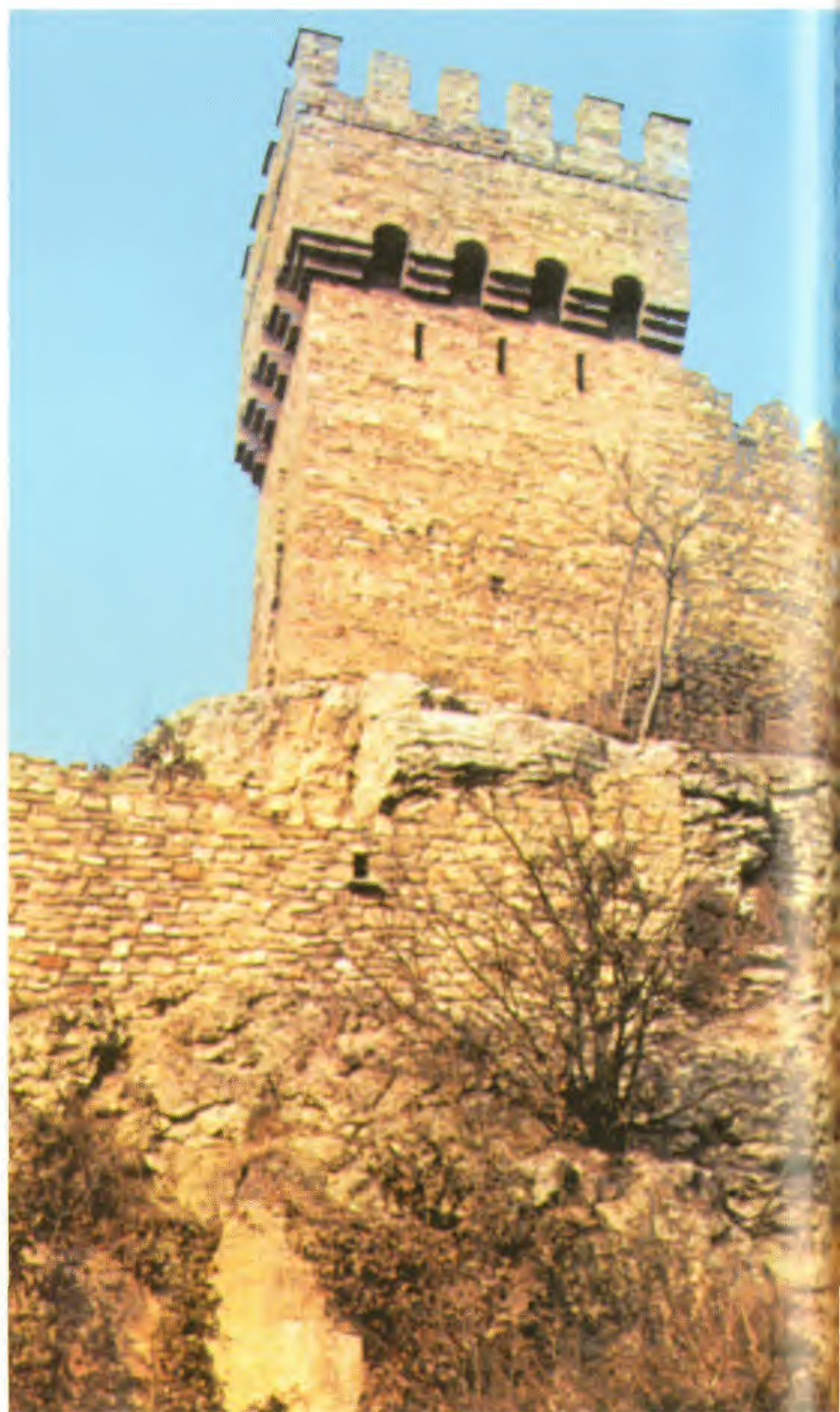
The Patriarchal Church of Tsarevets





Golden seal of Tsar Ivan Assen II

There is an evidence of life on them from as early as three thousand years BC. In the 4th century a solid fortress was built on Tsarevets, which succeeded in importance the Roman town of Nikopolis ad Istrum (the headquarters of the First Italian legion), annihilated by barbarians. It was this



The Baldwin tower of Tsarevets in Veliko Turnovo

fortress exactly that became the nucleus of medieval Tsarevgrad Turnov.

The big impetus in the sphere of building was given in the year 1185 when the Bulgarians overthrew the Byzantine rule. The tsars from the dynasty of the Assens

began an intense building of their new capital. The nucleus in the fortification was Tsarevets, whose wall-enclosed area was more than 100 000 square metres. In order to enter the centre of the old Bulgarian state, one had to pass through a complex



Tsar Ivan Alexander – miniature from the Tetraevangelium in the British Museum

system of a draw-bridge and three successive tower-gates.

The secular and religious authorities were also concentrated there. The tsar and the patriarch of Bulgaria resided in two separate castles with their own fortifications, erected behind the main wall. The tsarist castle had three separate yards, enclosed by public and residential build-

ings. The partially preserved Palace church and Throne house were once decorated with magnificent mosaics and murals. The main church of the Bulgarian kingdom, "God's Ascension", proudly displayed its cruciform-dome in the patriarchal castle, erected on the highest part of Tsarevets. The space between the two castles was thickly built up with residential districts,

The fortress walls of Tsarevets in Veliko Turnovo



whose ruins have been examined.

Trapezitsa is also girded with its own fortress wall. The boyars' quarter was situated there in the Middle Ages. Gradually, walls also came to enclose the separate districts which had sprung up in the foothills by the swift Yantra River – Nov Grad (New Town), Frank-Hisar (the centre of western-european traders, having its own church in gothic style), the spacious Armenian and Jewish colonies, which also had temples of their religions. The biggest one of the dis-

tricts was Nov Grad, where the revolt was launched in 1185. Still preserved nowadays are the beautiful churches of the Holy Forty Martyrs, “St. st. Peter and Paul”, “St. Demetrius”.

Similarly to other big medieval towns, tens of beautiful monasteries were erected in the environs of the Bulgarian capital – the Preobrazhenski Monastery (Monastery of the Transfiguration), The Holy Trinity (Sveta Troitsa) Monastery, the Kilifarevo Monastery. In the last quarter of the fourteenth century



The fortress walls of Tsarevets in Veliko Turnovo



The fortress walls of Tsarevets in Veliko Turnovo

there became home to a strong literary school, founded at the inspiration of the enlightened patriarch Euthymius. The school had a great impact on the Slavic orthodox peoples. For decades on end the churches and the intellectual circles of Russia, Serbia and the Romanian countries were dominated by Bulgarians. This upward trend was put an end to on 17 July 1393 when the Turks conquered Tsarevgrad Turnov after a several-month-long siege. However, Veliko Turnovo

also took a leading position in the belated National Revival in the 19th century. The hundreds of wonderful churches, houses and public buildings, picturesquely perched on the cliffs overhanging the Yantra river, stand as reminders of those times.

THE SEVERE CHERVEN AND THE ROCK MONASTERIES IN IVANOVO VILLAGE

We continue our trip northeast, towards the great river Danube. The hills of the Balkan Range remain behind us and we enter the spacious Danubian plain. At this place it is cut through by the numerous tributaries of the Russenski Lom river. At a few-kilometre distance only one could hardly expect to find a river flowing there. The milleniums, assisted by the water, have carved deep canyons, where the tributaries meander.

One of these tributaries is Cherni Lom. It makes a complete meander and encircles a steep hill almost entirely. The top of the hill is crowned by the inaccessible Cherven – one of the biggest Bulgarian towns in the 13th–14th century. Like Tsarevets Cherven sprung up over the remains of a powerful early Byzantine fortress from the 4th–6th century. Some of the defence fittings were preserved with their very crenels and they were directly included in the medieval



One of the Cherven towers

stronghold. Established as a military fortress, Cherven gradually grew into a real town with an enforced structure and a solid inner castle in the highest part of the hill. Unlike most of the medieval Bulgarian towns, literally razed to the ground during the Turkish invasion, it has survived the course of centuries in a very good condition. This does not mean that Cherven has not suffered a lot of historical vicissitudes. For example, at the beginning of the fourteenth century the town was conquered and demolished by the Tartars – that terrible plague for the eastern and the northern parts of Europe. However, the Bulgarian tsars restored it even more beautiful and mightier.

Cherven gives one the idea of what the medieval Bulgarian town in the 13th–14th century was actually like. With its wonderful and numerous churches, residential buildings and fortifications it was no different from its kins in Western and Eastern Europe. On the two sides of the narrow, dead-end streets there were two, three-storey high or even higher houses. There is a square in the centre, where you can see the predecessors of the town self-government – big public buildings with stone benches by the walls for the elders and the nobles.

However, the strikingly scenic river canyons attracted other people, too – the monks-hermits. Stretching all the way to the Danube the cliffs display tens of rock monasteries housed in natural or artificial caves. The most famous one of them is the Ivanovo Monastic Complex on the Russenski Lom river, which is one of the monuments under

the aegis of UNESCO. With its magnificent and excellently-preserved frescoes its main church sets a classic example of the elevated style of orthodox painting in the 14th c.

Like other rock monasteries in this region, the church was painted under the special protection of the Bulgarian tsars, a testimony to which is the unidentified ruler's image in the ante-chamber. The paintings are small-sized and they look like perfectly made miniatures. The walls are covered with hundreds of human figures in strikingly dynamic and realistic poses and movements. They picture scenes from the life of Christ and his predecessor, Saint John the Baptist. At the same time the paintings reflect the spirit of mysticism, characteristic of the Eastern Christian art.

Yet, the influence of modernity is hard to withstand. The attraction to the ancient heritage is obvious: antei and caryatids support the massive frontons of the public buildings; tables and chairs are adorned with antique theatrical masks; something incredible appears – a wholly undressed human body. The *Mocking of Christ* composition outrightly presents the circus games of clowns and acrobats, so realistic that they seem to have been borrowed from the square of the medieval town. These wonderful frescoes somehow strangely resound the quiet of the surrounding landscape. Ivanovo continues to be a natural reserve with a preserved flora and wild animals. One seems to have set oneself free from the grip of the twenty-first century civilization and to have magically been transferred into the past of the Bulgarian lands.

THE CARYATIDS IN THE SVESHTARI TOMB



Fragment of a golden rhyton from Sveshtari

Having almost reached the beautiful blue Danube, we will continue our journey southwards again. On the borderline of the hilly Ludogorie and the flat Dobrudja is situated a unique natural complex. The plain seems to unfold there and one moves to another, nether land. Unlike the cultivated fields in the upper part everything here is green. And everything is permeated with history.

On a small hill overhanging the Krapinetz river is situated a tower with traces left by ancient Thracian tribes having inhabited the place until the early Byzantine epoch (4th–6th century). As a matter of fact, Thracian building sites can be uncovered at other places, too, because the ancient people attached a high value to their own surroundings and considered them to bear a special, sacred significance. This significance has been preserved until the present days. At this place now is situated one of the main worship centres of the Muslims-Cazulbashi or the Aliani – a sect of orthodox Islam, founded by Mohammed's brother-in-law, Ali. With its beautiful reliefs and original architecture the Muslim Demirbaba Teke Monastery

stery is well worth a visit.

Undoubtedly, however, the strongest attraction in the vicinity of the present villages of Sveshtari and Sborianovo is the main necropolis, housing more than 100 Thracian burial mounds where rulers and representatives of the nobility were buried. One of these tombs was discovered in 1980 and has already been thoroughly examined and exhibited. It is exactly this tomb that bears the name the Sveshtari Tomb and is one of the Bulgarian monuments in the world cultural heritage list of UNESCO.

The stately structure was erected in the Hellenistic epoch – the first half of the 3rd century BC. This is the period of the historic marches of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Diadohi, who split the enormous empire after his death. It was then that the cultural achievements of many peoples from Europe and Asia intertwined. The local rulers strived after copying the glamour of the big dynasties – Ptolemei, Selevkidi, Antigoni. All of them attached particular importance to the afterlife of the human soul.

One could enter the vaulted chambers of the tomb through a passage whose entrance is outlined by massive columns. The Ionian capitals are coloured in blue and red, while above them is fixed a slabstone with stylized ox skulls – bukranas. All premises are built of smoothly worked limestone blocks. The central chamber houses two stone beds for the ruler and his wife buried there. Unfortunately, the underground fittings were plundered as early as Antiquity. They are considered to

have been designed for the Thracian Tsar Dromidex and his wife, the daughter of Lizimakh – one of the prominent commanders of Alexander the Great and ruler of Thracia after his death.

Fortunately, the magnificent ornamental decoration has been preserved. The walls of the central premise are decorated with ten wonderful relief images of women. These are lifelike caryatids, which support with two hands the ceiling of the tomb. The faces are strongly individualised and along with the relief colours have also been used. The thrill you get is incredible when you feel the stares of the prophets who lived 2300 years ago.

A decorative facade, shaped like a temple, is erected and supplemented by exquisite columns, capitals and cornices. Above the caryatids, on the northern wall, there is a painting of a wonderful picturesque scene, a masterpiece of the Hellenistic art. The scene shows the deceased like a hero-rider heading for the world beyond, while a goddess in front is bestowing him with a golden wreath. Behind him are the two armour-bearers with a long spear and a sword and behind the goddess comes her suite of four women, carrying gifts for the hero. Actually, the composition presents the very act of the deceased becoming a hero or being deified. This ritual, particularly typical of Hellenism, leaves no doubts that one of the prominent Thracian tsars had been buried in the Sveshtari tomb.

THE OLD GLORY OF THE BULGARIAN EMPIRE – THE CAPITALS OF PLISKA AND VELIKI PRESLAV

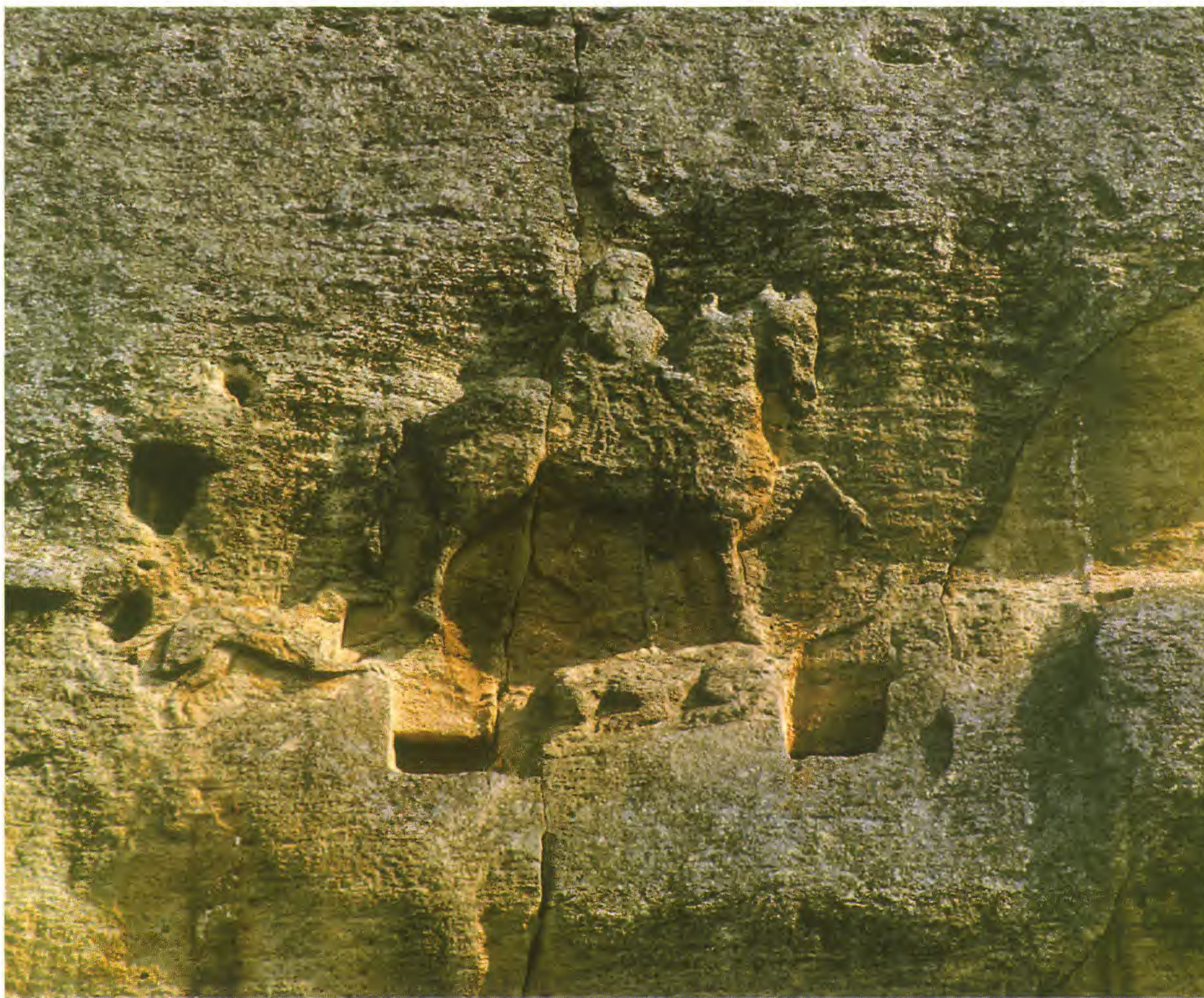


Aerophotograph of the palace in Veliki Preslav

We continue our trip and reach Shumen – one of the big towns in the northeastern part of the country. It was here 1300 years ago that the Bulgarian people, coming from the depths of Asia, settled. Their khans successfully rose against the mighty Byzantine Empire, conquering the lands and subjugating the populous Slavonic tribes there. The Bulgarians set up a strong and well-

organised country but they were destined to slavization due to their comparatively sparse population.

It was no accident that the nomads chose the flat territories along the lower course and the delta of the Danube River. These territories reminded them of the steppes of Middle Asia and the Caucasus, which they had crossed on horseback with



The Madara Horseman

their numerous herds. That was the reason why the first settlements of the Bulgarians constituted peculiar campsites, surrounded by earthen ramparts and moats. In cases of danger, they stayed within the grounds of the campsites with their cattle and household belongings.

Pliska, their first capital, constituted exactly such a type of campsite initially. Yet, as early as the middle of the eighth century, the Bulgarians became acquainted

with stone architecture. An enormous palace-castle, made of solid ashlars, with austere facades and an inner court-yard, was erected for the khan. However, during one of the wars with Byzantium in 811, Pliska was conquered. Although later Khan Krum defeated the Byzantines and killed their Emperor Nicephorus I Genik, the capital was plundered and razed to the ground.

His successor, Khan Omurtag, restored



Golden cross-relic from Pliska

Pliska again – building everything of stone this time. In the centre of the enormous area, enclosed by earthen rampart, he erected a strong stone fortress, whose walls were three metres thick. This area had straight and paved streets, starting from four solidly-built gates. There were spacious squares in the centre and above them towered the palaces of the Bulgarian rulers. Following the example of the ancient Asian tradition, the palaces were also enclosed by a wall, which served rather for concealing court life from the eyes of ordinary people than for defence. The premises of the khan abounded in different buildings – baths, water tanks, pagan temples. The earth beneath them was cut through by various fittings – secret passages, aqueducts and drainages. Many of these monuments can be seen even today.

The adoption of Christianity in 865 dramatically changed the appearance of Pliska. Tens of churches were built, the most famous of which was the Grand Basilica. The

enormous building, almost a hundred metres long, was among the most stately edifices of medieval Europe. A path paved with stone slabs, which has been preserved up to the present and which was used for grand church processions by the Bulgarian metropolitans, led into the building.

However, an unexpected event happened in 889. After the example of the Roman Emperor Julian Apostat, the new Bulgarian ruler Vladimir restored paganism. He destroyed the churches and restored the temples of the ancient deities. However, the process of restoration only lasted for four years. In 893 there was a national convention, during which Christianity was rehabilitated, while the capital was transferred to a new place – in Veliki Preslav, situated at a near distance. Simeon, who succeeded to the throne and



Painted icon of St. Theodor from Veliki Preslav



Aerophotograph of Pliska

became the mightiest ruler of his time, laid the foundations of the new capital.

However, before reaching Veliki Preslav, we pass by a magnificent plateau, whose vertical, thousand-metre-high cliffs seem to be touching the skies. This is Madara, which has been a cultural centre since times immemorial. At the very peak has perched a sturdy fort – the guardian of followers of different religions. Prehistoric people deified the austere cliffs, along which drops of water run and whose echo resembles the sounds of somebody weeping. Later, the Thracians erected the temple of the Three nymphs there. The newly-

arrived Bulgarians built temples in worship of their deities Tangra, Oumie and Yer Soub. Another magnificent monument, included in the list of UNESCO, dates back to that time – the monumental relief of the Madara Horseman, hewn out in the rocks at tens of metres height. The Bulgarians converted to Christianity in the period of the 10th–14th century hewed out hundreds of cells in the rocks so that they could pray to Christ.

Unlike Pliska, Veliki Preslav is not in the steppes, but at the very end of the Danubian plain, comfortably sheltered by the foothills of the Balkan Range. Veliki



Aerophotograph of the Round Golden Church in Veliki Preslav



Iconostasis of painted ceramics from Veliki Preslav

Preslav embodies the grandiose ideas of Tsar Simeon, who planned to annihilate Byzantium and to make Bulgaria the only world empire. Three successive belts of fortified walls enclose the magnificent palace, which ruled half of Europe at the beginning of the tenth century. Hundreds of aristocratic mansions and rich monasteries scat-

tered the whole interior of the settlement and its surroundings as far as tens of kilometres' distance.

The Great palace of the Bulgarian tsars is the biggest ensemble as far as the area it occupies is concerned. It was built in semblance of the one in Constantinople, whose foundations had been laid by Emperor

Constantine I the Great. A number of monumental buildings were situated behind the walls. For a whole century of intensive excavations archaeologists only managed to analyse a very little part of them. Each one of these buildings had its own function in the incredibly elaborate daily system of the ceremonies performed in the court. The ruins of the central cathedral, some of the tsars' and the patriarchs' rooms, baths and different temples have already been uncovered. Once they were richly decorated with marble panelling, columns, chapiters and cornices. The floors were covered with motley marble mosaics, which the then annalists likened to meadows of blooming flow-

ers. The Bulgarian tsars and aristocrats bathed in baths with an intricate system of floor-heating, while the water-supply and the sewer systems looked like the present ones.

Built with the purpose to outlive milleniums, Veliki Preslav, the way it has been described above, existed for less than a century. In 971 the Byzantines conquered the Bulgarian capital, taking advantage of the domestic conflicts having arisen after Tsar Simeon's death. Emperor John I Tzimiscēs, the victor, considered this to be his most remarkable military success and named the town after himself – Joanopolis.



The Preslav gold treasure

NESSEBUR – THE BYZANTINE GEM



The fortified walls of Nessebur

Crossing the eastern part of the Balkan, we find ourselves on the southern coastline of the Black Sea. History pervades this place here, as well. In the 8th–6th century BC the peninsulas fitted for life and defence were colonized by the ancient Greeks, who built well-fortified settlements on them. Soon after that these peninsulas became autonomous from the polises and started a life of their own. One of these towns is the present Nessebur – the ancient Mesambria – founded by settlers from of the Doric city of Megara.

The centuries have changed the appearance of the settlement a lot but there has always been life in it. Written sources and archaeological evidence suggest that a sturdy fortress towered above the picturesque peninsula, connected with the mainland only

by a narrow isthmus. The fortified colony had all the elements of a democratic Greek polis – theatres, high schools, sports facilities, a council hall of the citizens enjoying full rights. A theatre is known for sure to have existed in Mesambria, where the feast-day in honour of Dionysus was celebrated and there was also a big temple of Apolo.

Mesambria continued to exist as an important town in the Hellenistic and Roman epoch. The adoption of Christianity won it the status of a metropolitan centre. The oldest preserved church edifice on the Peninsula dates back to the second half of the fifth century – this is the Old Metropolitan Church, which is 25.5 metres long. Yet, the town of Nessebur reached its high point in the period of the 10th–14th century when Byzantium



The old Metropolitan Church in Nessebur

and Bulgaria rivalled for this beautiful Black sea town. However, the course of history has been merciful to tens of temples which constitute a whole museum of orthodox architecture nowadays.

A tour around the town of Nessebur is a really unforgettable experience. One enters the town through the excellently preserved fortress gate and starts along the narrow streets with houses dating back to the 17th–19th century. At that time the sailors and fishermen of the seaside settlement built two and three-storey houses, wood-panelled for protection from sea storms. Among the houses there were little squares with beautiful ancient churches.

The visitor can find all distinctive samples of Bulgarian medieval architecture. Beside the Old Metropolitan Church, another one

called the St. Stefan New Metropolitan Church was built in the thirteenth century. The magnificent ornamental painting, preserved up to the present day, was made in 1599 at the order of Christophor, the Nessebur metropolitan. In the period of 17th–18th century there were hundreds of pictures of ships and of different fishing contrivances. The Nessebur sailors used these pictures to pray to the Lord for protection in the stormy sea.

One can follow the development of the main type of orthodox architecture – churches with cruciform-domes. The early period of the 9th–10th century was marked by John the Baptist church. Its still austere apse already had a partial brick ornamentation, a pattern that would develop vigorously in the later Nessebur ecclesiastic edifices. And the

ornamental style of painting really reached its high point with the building of Christ the Pantocrator Church, Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel Church and especially St. John Aleiturgetos (the Unconsecrated) Church in the period of the twelfth-fourteenth century. The simple ornamental patterns, obtained by arranging the bricks between the stones in continuous or broken bands, angular meanders, stars, grids, etc., lend the structure a singular picturesqueness. This is further enhanced by the insertion of small round clay tiles round the window arches, the glimmer of their glaze varying with the changing day-

light, thus adding to the wonderful variation of colours. The centuries-long quest after merging architecture with monumental decoration in Byzantine architecture has been fully accomplished here.

Picturesque elements can be found in some other more simply designed Nessebur churches dating back to the 13th–14th c. – St. Paraskeva and St. Theodore churches. These elements already started disappearing in the 17th–18th c. with the building of shrines such as the St. Spass one, thus indicating the gradual loss of the town's former significance.

Ceramic-plastic ornamentation of a Nessebur church



THE TOMBS OF ANCIENT THRACIANS IN SOUTHERN BULGARIA



Mural paintings from the Kazanluk tomb

Giving an overview of the Thracians' burial mounds and tombs is a strenuous task. These include thousands of monuments which can be found north and south of the Stara Planina. Yet, they are mainly located in present-day Thracia, where the biggest state established by Thracians – the Odrysian Kingdom – stretched out in the 5th-3rd century BC. Although tombs were built from as early as the end of the Bronze Age (14th–13th century BC) up to the

adoption of Christianity, it was in the 5th–4th century BC that they reached their high point.

Let's choose two of the regions in South Bulgaria where the most remarkable monuments have been found – the regions of Kazanluk and Haskovo. Naturally, the Kazanluk tomb is known to every student. As far as its architectural design is concerned, it is quite simplified and consists of an open stone ante-chamber, a passage

with a triangular vault and a domed brick chamber. What distinguishes the Kazanluk tomb are the lovely murals, whose style suggests that they date back to the end of the 4th century BC. Two figurative friezes, adorning the central premise picture a regal feast and a chariot race.

The genius artist has portrayed the Thracian ruler and his wife, sitting on

exquisite chairs at a hearty spread. The tsar takes his wife's hand with an elegant gesture of his one hand, while raising a silver goblet of wine with his other hand. Slaves carry dishes, wine and gifts for the life after death. At the end of the procession comes the four-horse chariot of a ruler, which is to be buried with him. However, the upper frieze vividly illustrates the competitive



*Mural paintings
from the Kazanluk tomb*



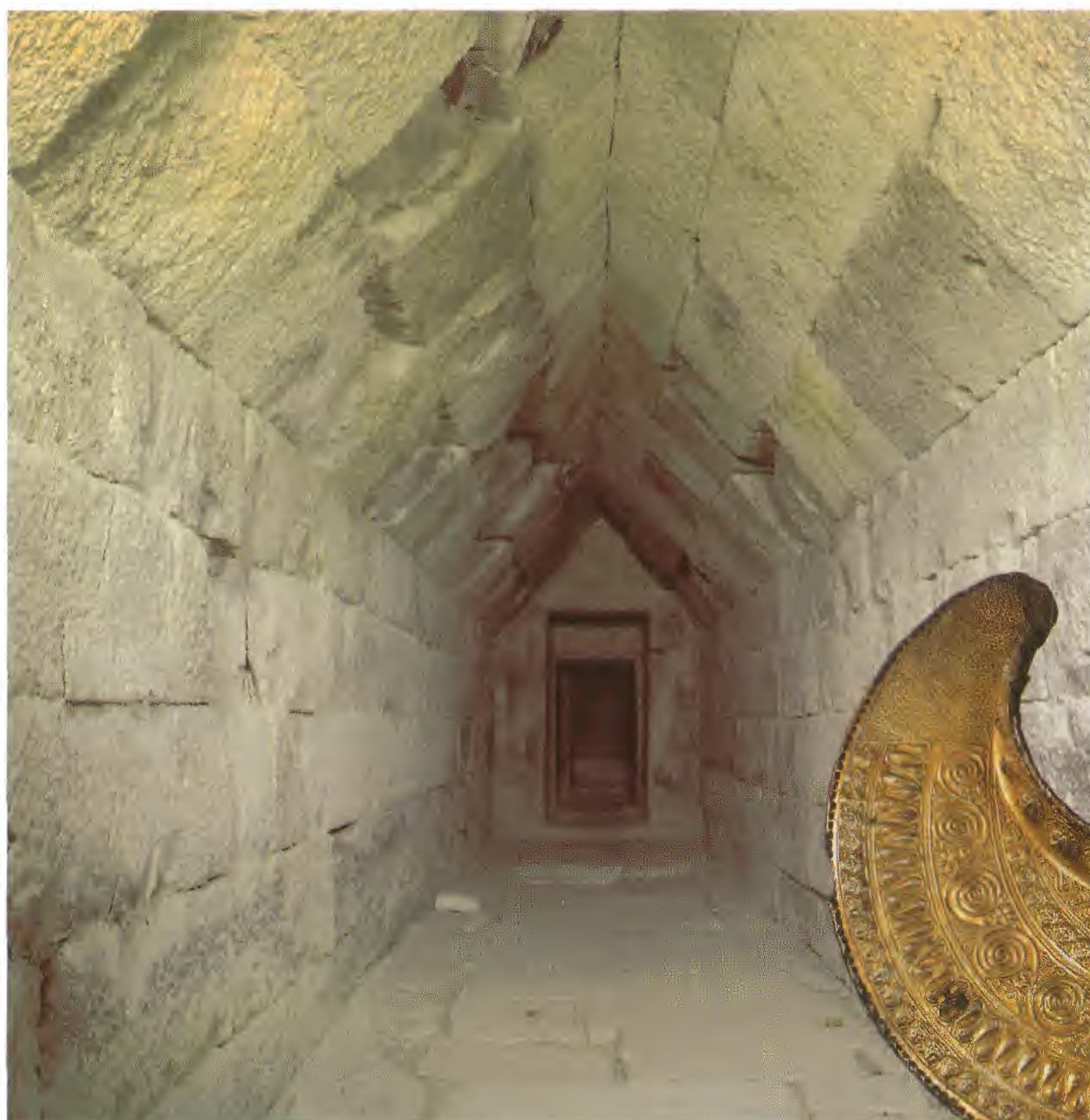
*The Valley of the Thracian Tsars.
A unique temple in a mound in
the environs of Shipka, 5th–4th
century BC*

rush of the galloping two-horse chariots. The numerous images are richly coloured and realistically painted. The peak of perfection has been achieved with the portrait of the ruler's wife. In spite of her reclining position on the chair, the painter has managed to convey the slight movements of her hands and head, as well as the melancholic expression of her face.

Only a few kilometres from Kazanluk, in the southern foothills of the Balkan Range is situated the big Shipka–Sheinovo mound necropolis. In 1992–1993 a few magnificent burial fittings were uncovered, thus causing the region to be called the Valley of Tsars. Beautiful burial gifts were found in

some of them, having miraculously survived the pillage of tombs in Antiquity. These are bony sacerdotal sceptres, massive golden rings and necklaces, silver and bronze pots, pieces of horse accoutrements.

However, the most interesting design proved to be the one of the mausoleum-tomb in the mound of Ostrousha. Somewhere in the middle of the 4th century BC. the ancient people erected the more than a twenty-metre-high mound. To the south of it, they built the burial fittings, which remained uncovered up until the end of the century. The original thing about the mound is that it looks like an ancient



The Mezek tomb



*Thracian pectoral
from Mezek*

shrine, made of one big solid block sized 2.5/2.5/3 metres. The roof has two tiers, with triangular gables to the north and south. The entrance of the mausoleum-tomb has a southern exposure, while inside an ornamented burial bed has been hewn out. Once the interior was richly ornamented with figurative scenes, destroyed by the passage of time and the hands of the plunderers, who tried to scrape the gold-foil off the walls. Yet, one wonderful image of a woman has survived, hinting at the ancient artist's mastership.

We are moving south now, almost reaching the present-day border. The tomb at the

village of Mezek, the region of Svilengrad, is one of the biggest domed tombs ever found. Its length of 30 metres is impressive – one passes two-thirds of the distance through a high passage, sheltered with a triangular vault. The three premises come last, the very last of which is the sepulchral domed chamber. The walls of the tomb represent smoothly cut stone blocks. Among the numerous tomb finds stands out the exquisite chandelier, adorned with the figure of a dancing satyr and the massive figure of a wild boar – brilliant works of bronze classical statues from the end of the 4th century BC.

An important discovery concerning Bulgarian archaeology was made at the very end of the year 2000. Another domed tomb, whose central chamber is wall-painted, was found in the locality of the village of Alexandrovo near Haskovo. The frescoes are considerably more primitive than the ones of the Kazanluk tomb, probably because they were painted earlier, at the beginning of the 4th century BC. However, they abound in realism, even naturalism.

A unique picturesque decoration in red, blue, yellow, black and prevalent brick colour nuances, unfolds before our eyes. Hunting scenes, well-known from Thracian toreutics and jewellery plastic arts, are pictured in the frescoes. Warriors, on foot or

on horseback, hunt boars, deer and other animals. The Alexandrovo wall-paintings represent a reality much closer to the actual life of the ancient Thracians.

Every year new finds are added to the list of uncovered Thracian tombs. Despite ancient and present-day pillagers, the museums are getting enriched with extremely valuable exponents. However, in 2000 there were two finds, which radically changed the opinions on many archaeological matters. Namely, these are the Starossel temple, buried under a grandiose mound and the rock castle of Perperikon in the Eastern Rhodopes.



A detail from the murals in the Thracian tomb near the village of Alexandrovo in the Haskovo region (4th century BC)

Quite recently in the Valley of the Kings another tomb and two unique finds near it were discovered. The first is a golden burial mask weighing over 600 g and the second is a bronze male head from a magnificent statue dated from the 4th c. BC.

*A bronze head of a Thracian ruler,
Shipka, 4th c. BC*



*A golden mask of the Thracian ruler
Teres, Shipka, 5th c. BC*



STAROSSEL – THE BURIED TEMPLE



Chetinov mound near Starosel

In the 5th century BC. Teres, a Thracian ruler, managed to unite a big part of the tribes under his sceptre. The Odrysian Kingdom was established and it became one of the biggest states in the ancient world. Making use of the legendary Greek-Persian warriors, Teres's son Sitalkes

(444–424 BC) expanded the territory of his realm considerably. He was as emblematic for his time as Tsar Kserks for Persians and Pericle for Greeks.

Naturally, the uncovering of direct evidence for his personality would arouse the great interest of scholars. So when in

August 2000 the archaeologist George Kittov announced that he had found Tsar Sitalkes's tomb the fact went down as a scholarly sensation.

The magnificent Chetinov mound is situated north of Plovdiv and it is in the immediate proximity of the Balkan Range. Made in Antiquity, it had long been considered a natural rising ground due to its colossal size. However, the crucial thing about it is that the underground fittings unearthed at

excavations do not constitute a typical tomb but a singular temple-tomb. According to its excavator, this sanctuary had also housed the burial of a Thracian ruler apart from the performance of traditional cult rituals in it – Tsar Sitalkes.

The temple-tomb consists of two adjacent chambers – the first has a square, the second – a rectangular layout. They were fronted by a spacious ritual landing, flanked by solid stone stairs on three sides. Both



The grandiose Thracian temple in the Chetinov mound near Starossel in the region of Hissar (5th c. BC)

chambers are ornamented with geometric paintings in blue, green, red and black to imitate the triglyphs and metopes of a Hellenistic temple. A monumental supporting wall surrounds the sanctuary. The wall, the stairs and the underground temple are built by massive and smoothly-cut stone blocks.

The second overarched chamber has a six-metre diameter and it is the most important part in the design of the whole composition. What is characteristic about it is the fact that its walls are adorned with semi-columns, which have vertical grooves. The few finds, having survived past and present plunder, suggest that the Thracian ruler was buried with rich gifts.

Silver rings, golden buttons, arrow points and scanty remains of a golden burial wreath as well as Hellenic pottery have been uncovered. The skeletons of two horses in the first chamber, sacrificed to accompany their master in his death, also have a bearing to the funeral. The ritual of burying the horses with their master is known from a number of other Thracian tombs.

The find described above also has a direct bearing to the unearthed stone grave in the adjacent Peitchovo mound, lying at some thirty metres from the buried temple. The man buried in it is also considered to have been a tsar in the same century. The well-preserved sepulchral finds testify to this supposition: a golden ring portraying a



*Golden ring-seal with the image
of a Thracian horseman
stabbing a boar with his spear.
The Peichovo mound
near Starossel*

horseman who strikes a boar during hunting; silver and bronze pottery; a golden ceremonial wreath to adorn the head; a shield, a helmet and swords; red-figure pottery and two sets of harness ornaments.

In 2002 in another mound near Starossel – the so called Horizon mound – a second buried temple with a magnificent front colonnade was discovered.

The temple buried in Starossel has posed a lot of questions, which have long been waiting for an answer in the field of Thracian studies. A number of scholars suspect that the tomb of the Thracian rulers had been

used repeatedly. Actually, the ancient people performed ritual burials of their tsars. The tombs were kinds of temples which could be entered and exited. The solid doors with chiseled grooves, which have been opened repeatedly, bear testimony to this hypothesis. Such is also the situation in Starossel, while the design of the underground structure as a typical temple already draws us closer to the right answer. Surely, the answer will be found during the ongoing archaeological work at the Starossel complex and other sepulchral ensembles of ancient Thracians.



*Fragment from
the temple's decoration*

PERPERIKON – DIONYSUS'S ORACLE



Perperikon

The Eastern Rhodopes are one of the areas of Bulgaria where archaeological sites have been best preserved. Always near the centres of Mediterranean civilization the lower part of the mountainous area is literally covered with historical and cultural

monuments. It is an open secret that the most significant exponents of Thracian megalith culture can be found there – the thousands of hewn-out nooks in the vicinity of Strandjevo, Duzhdovnitsa, Zhenda; the rock temples and tombs at Tatoul and

Ovtchevo, the dolmens around the border with Greece. However, Perperikon stands out among all these.

Archaeological evidence has shown that life on the rocky hill started as early as the Aenolithic-Chalcolithic Age – five-four thousand years BC. During the Bronze and the early Iron Age (three thousand years – sixth century BC.) the locality acquired the significance of a worship site. Thousands of differently sized stone altars were chiseled, where Thracian clans offered sacrifice to

The palace in Perperikon



The Metropolitan Church of Perperikon



The mosaics of the Metropolitan Church of Perperikon



the deities. Some of the altars were probably also intended for human sacrifice, as described by ancient Greek authors.

However, Perperikon was at its height at the very end of the era past. The ancient worship site grew into a big ancient city. At the highest point of the hill was built a solidly fortified Acropolis – a sturdy fortress with three-metre-thick walls. Astonishingly, the ancient builders erected the stronghold

with well-shaped and smooth stones but without any solder. The fortress was intended to defend the developed under-settlements and their solid buildings, whose lower floors were hewn out straight in the rock. However, the biggest sensation was the uncovering of a splendid ruler's palace, situated right under the Acropolis of Perperikon.

It is also enclosed by its own fortress



The Acropolis of Perperikon

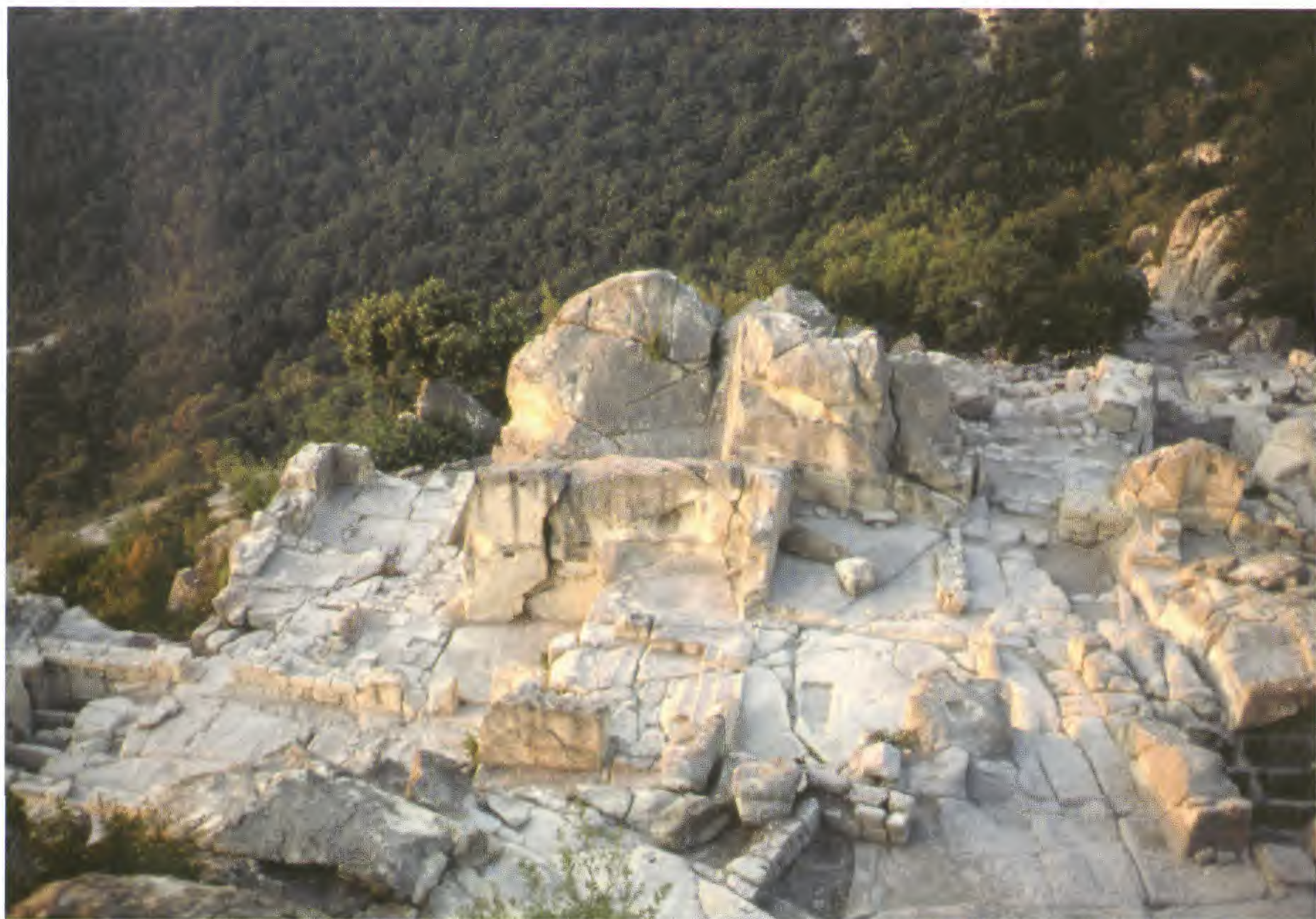


The hall for prophecies with the altar

wall, built in a similar way and almost as thick, with two ends linked to the fortifications of the Acropolis. The archaeological studies from the 2000–2001 period showed that the ground floor of the palace occupies an area of 17 000 square metres and it is divided into about fifty separate rooms. These are very well-preserved because they are hewn out straight in the rock at the depth of 5–6 metres. The premises house ceremonial halls, rooms, corridors with brilliantly shaped walls, doors and staircases. However, it has become clear that the palace had at least three other floors, having left traces in the neighbour-

ing rocks. After all, the premises in the grandiose ensemble were about 100, while underground there were stone tombs of the rulers' dynasties. The central gate of the palace can be reached through a hundred-metre-long passage-staircase, also hewn out in the rocks. One is literally dumbfounded by the scope of the complex and by the thought of the hundreds of tons of stones used for its construction.

Naturally, the question arises what Perperikon stood for in Antiquity. A big town, a large worship centre, a ruler's residence? Although it is too early to draw any final conclusions, it most probably func-



Perperikon. The royal palace-sanctuary

tioned as all of these. And it is at this point that history gives us the clue to some important sources.

Herodotus tells that when the Persian King Kserks was advancing in his march against Greece via the Aegean region, messengers from the Thracian tribe of Satri came to see him. They inhabited the Sacred Mountain (the Rhodopes) and as far as one can judge by the description – its eastern part. The Greek historian adds that the tribe kept under control the sacred town of the Thracians, which had a temple of Dionysus and an oracle, not less known than the renowned Delphi with its oracle. More

recent authors, among whom the Roman writer Svetonnius note that prophecies of fateful significance were made in the Rhodope oracle. For example, it was there that Alexander the Great learnt that he would conquer the world, while Octavian August's father learnt on the day of his son's birth that the latter was destined to establish the Great Roman Empire.

Being a centre of the utmost significance in the Eastern Rhodopes, Perperikon undoubtedly matches the description of the sanctuary searched for.

In 2002-2003 in the palace-sanctuary an oval hall with 30 m. diameter was dis-



The tombs-sarcophagi from the palace in Perperikon

covered in the centre of which there is a big round altar. The discovered installation literary coincides with the description of the ancient authors.

As in Delphi, in High Antiquity the prophets inhabited small and poor temples, where they made their prophecies. The magnificent architectural design appeared much later. Archaeological excavations have shown that there was dynamic life going on in Perperikon in the Roman period. Both Rome and Perperikon suffered the vicissitudes of the fourth century – the adoption of Christianity and the barbarian assaults, which caused it severe demolition during that same century.

However, it was restored as magnificent



as it had been as early as the 5th–6th century. Already functioning as a metropolitan centre, Perperikon grew into one of the chief centres of the Eastern Rhodopes and the Aegean region. In the 9th–10th century at the foot of the hill was built a large monastery with a number of buildings and churches, adorned with brilliant mosaics, marble and painted pottery. Along with

another splendid ensemble, the St. John Prodrom Monastery in the modern town of Kardjaly – situated at a fifteen-kilometre distance, Perperikon was the administrative and religious centre of the big district of Akhridos, as the Eastern Rhodopes were known in medieval times.

Bulgarians, Byzantines, crusaders and Turks waged wars for this place. Historical

The eastern part of the palace in Perperikon



sources have stored notes for such a war in 1343 when the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander sent army forces with the special mission to conquer Perperikon. The Bulgarians kept the town under their control for a few months only, yet their presence is testified by the only one preserved golden seal of Tsar Ivan Alexander, which had probably been attached to the document decreeing that Perperikon joined the

Bulgarian territory.

The Turks, who settled there towards the end of the 14th century, also bowed down before the ruins of the sacred Perperikon. Similarly to the situation with the Sveshtari tomb, the present-day inhabitants descend from the sect of "the red-headed" (the kazalbashi). They encircled the remains of the town with their temples, while the hill was named Jin Tepessi, the Hill of Ghosts.



Perperikon. The stairs of the royal palace

GEORGIANS ON THE BALKANS – THE BACHKOVO MONASTERY



Aerophotograph of the Bachkovo Monastery

From Kurdjali we cross the Rhodopes northwards, and at the town of Assenovgrad we find ourselves in the Thracian Valley. Only at a twenty-kilometre distance is situated the second-biggest town of present-day Bulgaria – namely, the town of Plovdiv. The settlement, established by Phillip of Macedon, was a centre of distinction in the period of the Roman Empire and third town of the Byzantine Empire. What has remained from the ancient Philippo-

polis are parts of the fortress walls, public buildings, aqueducts. Particularly outstanding is the amphitheatre, used for the staging of performances nowadays.

However, we have a different aim. Once again we make our way into the Rhodopes on the meandering road to Smolyan. At eleven kilometres distance from Assenovgrad, by the Chaya river, is situated one of the most outstanding monuments of orthodoxy on the Bulgarian lands. The Bachkovo



The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery

Monastery was built in 1083 by two brothers from Georgia – Gregorius and Abasius Pacourianos. The former was a high dignitary at the Byzantine Empire – head of the western troops and strong adherent of Emperor Alexius I Comnenus. At his order a monastery statute (tipick), regulating the estates of the monastery and all the spheres of life in it, was drawn up.

This rare ancient manuscript, having outlived the course of the centuries, tells that at the beginning only Georgians could reside in the monastery, while Byzantine

monks were prohibited admission. Gradually, however, the area around was becoming exclusively populated with Bulgarians and the monastery lost its Georgian aspect. The present-day preserved buildings date back to different periods of the Bulgarian presence – a small church from the 13th–14th century, a dining room with mural paintings from the 17th century, lovely frescoes by Zachary the Zograph on the facades of the monastery wings, built in the 19th century. It was also then that the main church was



*The central church
of the Bachkovo Monastery*

rebuilt on the site of the initial one.

One building only has been preserved since the distant in time 11th century – a two-storey monastic ossuary, situated at three or four hundred kilometres distance from the cloister. It has a beautiful design of alternating layers of stone and brick. However, the most distinctive about it are the splendid and excellently preserved mural paintings from the second half of the 12th century, one of the recognized master-

pieces of Byzantine painting. The wall-paintings are akin to such classic examples of the comnenus style as the ensembles in the St. Panteleymon Church near Skopje and the Dmitriiv Church in the Russian town of Vladimir. Especially impressive is the picturesque handling of the images, totally contradicting the thesis about the dullness and flatness of the Byzantine art of painting. The artists have used bright colours, the images have a convincing psychological aspect and

there is also dynamism of movements suggested in the paintings. The peak of creation has been achieved with the portrait of the Virgin from the *Doomsday* scene. With Archangels Michael and Gabriel standing on her two sides the Virgin face emanates tenderness and lyricism. She and the archangels bear some antique beauty, so inherent of the Byzantine art in eternal quest of its ancient heritage.

We are returning to Plovdiv. Only at a few kilometres distance from the Bachkovo Monastery threateningly towers a solidly fortified castle, as if having sprung up right from medieval legends. And really, the old Stenimakhos is enveloped with the secrets of legends and historical facts stored in the

manuscripts. In the 11th century the fortress was built for protection of the Bachkovo Monastery, but it quickly grew into a town. In 1205 the Bulgarians laid siege to the French knights-crusaders in the fortress for 13 months, thus forcing them to eat their war horses. Some time later the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Assen II restored the crucial stronghold and marked it with a big building inscription, hewn out in big characters into the rocks. Even nowadays the sturdy towers and fortress walls continue to remind of the past grandeur of Bulgaria. Among them is the excellently-preserved two-tiered St. Mother of God Petrich Church, having perched like a bird on the cliffs.

The Assen's Fortress



THE BOYANA MASTER



The Boyana Church

Our trip is coming to its end. We are returning to Sofia, the present-day capital of Bulgaria, on the broad southern motorway. At the end of the 19th century Sofia was chosen centre of the Bulgarian state by the first parliament after the liberation from the Turkish rule. It was a comparatively

small town then, but it was rich in history. Once it was inhabited by the ancient Thracian tribe of the serdi, who named the established settlement Serdika. In the Roman period it became a central town and in the 4th century it hosted one of the most important ecumenical councils. The main



*The facade
of the Boyana Church*

preserved antique buildings in Sofia – the St. Sofia Basilica and the St. George Church, etc. – date from that same period.

In the 9th century the Bulgarians captured the important Byzantine town and named it Sredets. It became the solid stronghold of the kingdom and it resisted invaders more than once. For example, in the 14th century Sredets stood up to the almost ten-year-long siege of the mighty

Turkish army and it held back the army march towards the interior of Europe for a long time. In the vicinity of the Bulgarian capital there is another monument, placed in the list of UNESCO – the renowned Boyana Church.

The building is not very big but it is extremely exquisite and finely-proportioned. It was built in the 11th–12th century, but at the beginning of the 13th century

ry it was extended and its walls were entirely painted. Its frescoes have been preserved very well and they have made the world speak about pre-Renaissance drifts in medieval Bulgaria. Actually, the frescoes have more to do with one of the summits of orthodox art (a form of art that had its own specifics, but, unfortunately, its devel-

opment was tragically discontinued by the Turks).

On entering the church one literally plunges into the vortex of colours and hues. The Boyana master, whose name is not known, tells us the history of Christianity – the birth and sufferings of Christ, the life of St. Mother of God, the



The images of the Boyana Church founders in its murals

passional of St. Nickola. The images of different saints are painted on the walls. Some of the them bear a unique individuality, as the ones of Christ Everghet, St. Evstratius, the characters from the *Crucifix* scene, etc. And *The Young Christ among Scribes* composition boasts one of the best effigies of children not only in the medieval Bulgarian but also in the European art of the period.

Fortunately, the building inscription on the northern wall of the Boyana Church has survived. It clearly indicates that the church was painted in 1259, at the order of sebastocrator Kaloyan, cousin of the Bulgarian tsar and grandson of the Serbian King Stefan. A bit to the one side the portraits of the high-ranking aristocrats and the then rulers can be seen. There are full-length portraits of sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Dessislava, as well as of Tsar Konstantin Assen Tikh and Tsaritsa Irina. Beside the notable for its time individualisation of portraying, the portraits afford one the unique chance to get an insight of the details of clothing and mugs of the noblemen.

The aristocratic touch of the Boyana paintings reflects one of the trends in Bulgarian art of 13th-14th c. Other trends coexisted together with this one – for example the national tradition standing in the basis of another big medieval monu-

ment – the Zemen Church near Kyustendil.

In the years of the Turkish yoke, the medieval Bulgarian aristocracy was mercilessly crushed. And as it is known, during this period it was the nobility that embodied the idea of the national state. However, the ordinary Bulgarians managed to preserve intact the memory of their tsars and noblemen. By the fireplace were told countless legends about the last Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Shishman, his voivodes and their unequal battle with the Turks.

Today archaeology and history help us find and see the portraits of the old Bulgarian rulers. For the last years a number of lead seals with the images of Prince Boris-Michael the Baptist and his son, Simeon the Great, in his full dress of emperor, have been uncovered. The mural paintings in the churches from the 13th–14th century and the few preserved illuminations in the manuscripts have afforded us the opportunity to see the portraits of a succession of tsars and aristocrats. Along with the remarkable monuments on the Bulgarian lands, they will help enhance the low self-esteem of our people. However, as one more argument was noted at the beginning – the cultural-historical heritage will provide another means of living for the Bulgarians in the first decades of the 21st century.

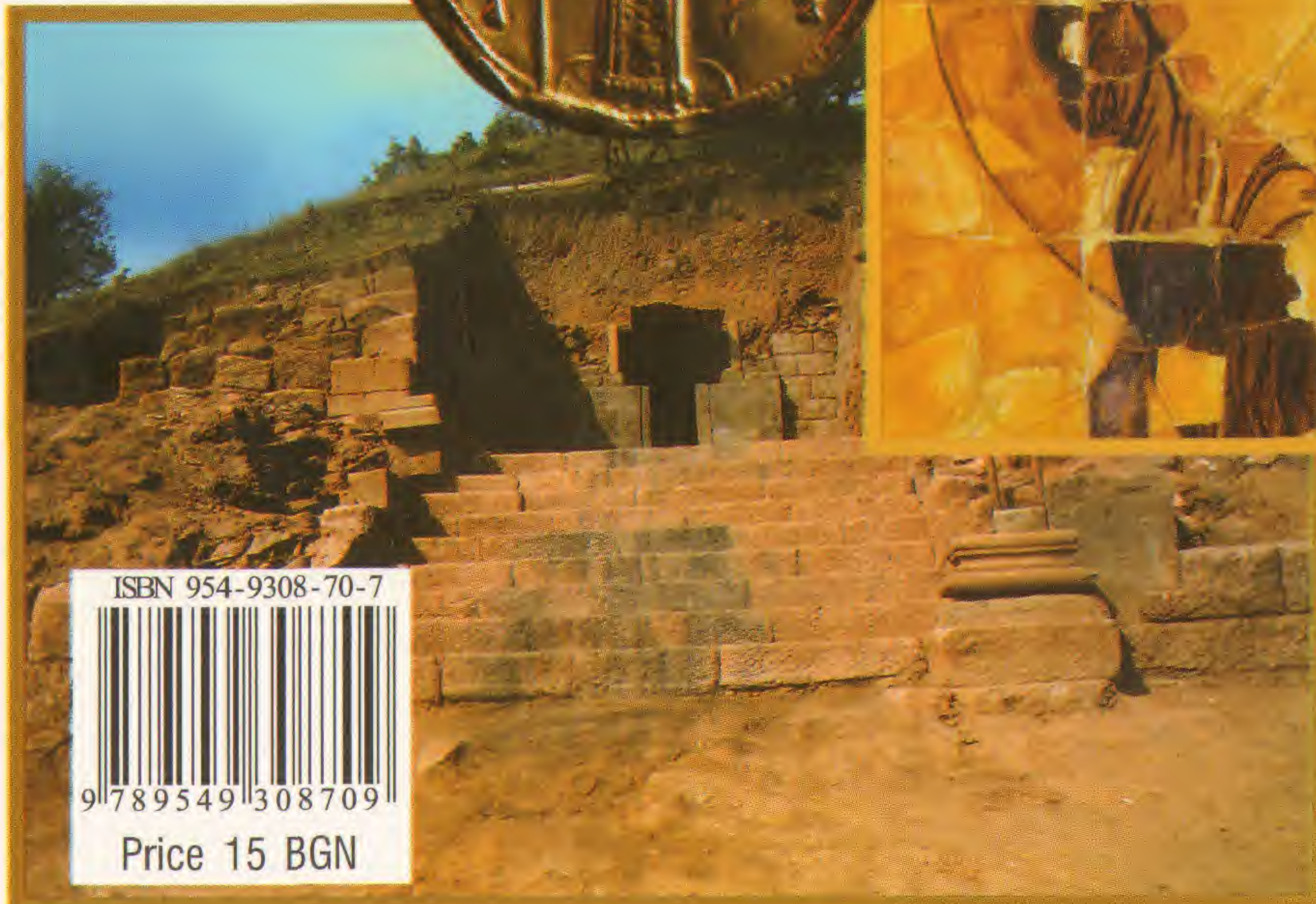
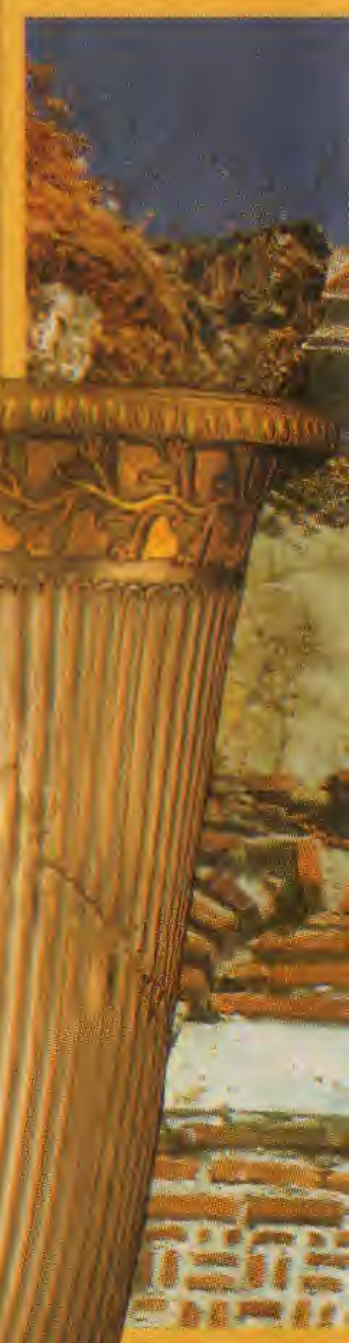
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